Funeral Rites

763 If the eyes of a dying person become fixed in a stare, his soul cannot escape and his agony is prolonged. That is why the Matacos cover the faces of the dying with a piece of cloth and knot it about the throat. This cloth often contributes to accelerate the end by asphyxiating them. Their rush to bury the dead is so great that it sometimes results in the interment of persons who are still alive.

764 The widow, her head shaved, is isolated in a corner of the hut, separated from the rest of the room by a curtain, or else she is placed in a small annex attached to the hut.

[162] Immediately after the death of a young man who had committed suicide in the village of San Patricio, his mother crouched on the earth, placed the dead boy's head on her knees and began to grieve for him, saying repeatedly the word "yos," "yos" (my son, my son). The father beat a drum, day and night in accompaniment of a dirge in which the expression "yos," "yos," was much in evidence. A group of women, under the direction of the mother who was shaking a rattle [18] executed a dance which consisted of little jumpy steps near the place where the corpse had been placed before the burial.

587] A widower or a widow may marry again two or three months after their spouse's demise. The women excuse themselves by saying: "I had to eat, I need someone who will clothe me."

Burial up in a tree, as described by Enrique Palavecino, used at one time to be very common in the middle region of the Bemejo.

Belief in the Reality of Dreams

787 842 The missionary Barbrooke Grubb has given numerous examples of the belief of the Lengua Indians in the reality of dreams. I have myself collected a good many examples of this belief among the Tobas and Pilagas. Here is an anecdote which illustrates this attitude among the Matacos. A girl from the village of San Patricio woke up weeping one beautiful morning. When asked about the cause of her sorrow, she answered that she had dreamed that she had had sexual relations with a young man and was afraid of becoming pregnant... (Footnote: Sent from the Smithsonian Institute of Washington by the author, a corresponding member. Translated from the French by Dr. Fernando Márquez Miranda, also a member).

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586 [577] Laziness and incompetence are other things that often lead to divorce. If it is the woman who justly is accused of these faults she can be forced out of the house and her parents will take no counter steps. If in such circumstances there are small children in the marriage, she may be allowed to take them, but if the husband continues to send them small gifts and food he retains the right to them and gets them back at an age of 5–6, as they belong to his band. If, on the other hand, he fails to show them any attention, he loses them and may not even be allowed to play with them. Should it be the man who is lazy, his wife makes no mention of it but her parents become angry with him. One day when the man is out seeking food, the parents exhort their daughter to hide herself with some family. When the husband returns home he discovers what is going on without his in-laws saying anything to him. He also says nothing, but begins to collect his things together. He will not leave the house until nightfall, unseen, because he is ashamed, and then return to his family. It is said that this custom was far more widespread [178] a generation ago than it is now. Several women, with a smile, expressed their relief at this as "they would never manage to have any fun out of a man before he was kicked out by his in-laws, for nowadays all men are lazy".

[842] The third—and last—cause of divorce socially recognized is: childless marriages. It is always the woman who is considered to be sterile, and consequently the man who takes the initiative for divorce. However, in such cases it is he who leaves the house, presumably because he has already sought contact with a possible [587] new wife. His sister may help him to get into touch with one of her friends and let them meet secretly in the forest to discover whether they like each other. The man thus leaves the house as he falls under the rule governing unfaithful husband, and not because his wife is sterile.

[587] [589] Whatever the reason for a Mataco divorce, it is always a heavy blow, both morally and economically, for the spouse that is left. The economic loss can only be made good by re-marriage, and this nearly always takes place. Unmarried persons are reduced to living partly on the bounty of the family as occupations are so sharply divided according to sex.

762 A person who feels himself rejected or a victim of unhappy love sometimes commits suicide, which with the Mataco appears to occur particularly in this connexion and is always done in the same manner. The unfortunate one goes alone into the forest and collects the very poisonous fruit of the *sacha sandia* (Capparis salicifolia), which the Indian then cooks lightly and eats. After a few hours [278] when no remedy is possible, the Indian returns home and lies down to sleep. Death comes very shortly. In cases of suicide the spouse of the dead person will [682] always be pointed to as the one responsible. In consequence, the family of the dead person will in many cases start a campaign against that of the spouse to obtain blood vengeance or, more probably, to secure economic compensation.

182 684 628 According to Mataco unwritten law infidelity is severely punished by the loss of home and children. This should occasion no surprise, for adultery, on account